

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANILA 02354 241135Z

53

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

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R 240939Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 837

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 2354

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: FEB. 27 REFERENDUM: THE HARDER GOVERNMENT TRIES THE  
PHONIER IT LOOKS

REF: A) MANILA 2294

B) MANILA 2153

BEGIN SUMMARY: ARCHDIOCESE HAS BANNED REFERENDUM DISCUSSIONS  
AND DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL MATERIALS IN MANILA CHURCHES.  
COMELEC HAS WARNED THAT "ALEINS" TRYING TO SABOTAGE REFERENDUM  
WILL FACE PROSECUTION AND DEPORTATION. SUPREME COURT HAS  
AGAIN AFFIRMED REFERENDUM'S CONSTITUTIONALITY BUT STRESSED  
ITS "CONSULTATIVE NATURE." --IMPLYING THEREBY IT IS NOT BIND-  
ING ON MARCOS. COMELEC NOW ESTIMATES UPWARDS OF 25 MILLION  
HAVE REGISTERED FOR FEB. 27 EXERCISE AND IS PREDICTING MORE  
THAN 22 MILLION WILL OVTE. PRESIDENT MARCOS WILL HOLD  
NATIONALLY TELEVISED DISCUSSION ON REFERENDUM WITH REPRES-  
ENTATIVES FROM ALL PARTS OF THE PHILIPPINES TOMORROW EVENING  
(FEB. 25). GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO ENSURE THERE ARE NO SUR-  
PRISES ON THURSDAY ONLY DETRACT FURTHER FROM REFERENDUM'S  
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PAGE 02 MANILA 02354 241135Z

ALREADY MINIMAL CREDIBILITY. END SUMMARY

1. WITH REFERENDUM LESS THAN THREE DAYS AWAY, GOVERNMENT HAS ADOPTED STRONGER PUBLIC STANCE TOWARD BOYCOTT PROPONENTS. COMELEC CHAIRMAN PEREZ HAS WARNED THAT "ALIENS" (READ FOREIGN CLERICS) INTERFERING WITH REFERENDUM WILL BE PROSECUTED AND DEPORTED. COMELEC NO DOUBT PLEASED BY ARCH-BISHOP SIN'S BAN ON REFERENDUM DISCUSSION IN CHURCHES AND HIS STATEMENT FAITHFUL SHOULD VOTE ACCORDING TO THEIR CONSCIENCES (DETAILS SEPTEL.) COMELEC OFFICIALS HAVE WARNED LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN CEBU AREA AGAINST EFFORT "TO MAKE MOCKERY OF REFERENDUM" (READ ENCOURAGE "NO" VOTE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT QUESTION). DESPITE WARNINGS, REPORTS PERSIST OF WIDE-SCALE OPPOSITION TO APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL OFFICIALS IN VISAYAS ESPECIALLY IN NEGROS. GEN. ROMULO AND LABOR SECRETARY OPLE SPOKE IN CEBU LAST WEEKEND, ONLY FEW DAYS AFTER PRESIDENT, URGING PARTICIPATION IN REFERENDUM AND YES VOTE ON BOTH QUESTIONS.

2. ON FEBRUARY 22, SUPREME COURT DISMISSED FORMER CONCON DELEGATES PETITION (REF B) CHALLENGING REFERENDUM'S CONSTITUTIONALITY. IN ITS DECISION, COURT STRESSED THAT PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS HAD MADE CLEAR REFERENDUM "PURELY CONSULTATIVE." BULLETIN COLUMNIST VALENCIA, WHO IS GOVERNMENT MOUTHPIECE, TOOK SIMILAR LINE IN HIS FEB. 24 COLUMN, WRITING THAT LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WILL BE RETAINED OR CHANGED AFTER DEC 31 ON BASIS OF PERFORMANCE AUDIT NOT ON BASIS OF REFERENDUM RESULTS.

3. MISSION OFFICER, WHO ACCOMPANIED GOV. SOCRATES (CURRENTLY DLGCD UNDERSECRETARY) TO PLAWAN, LEARNED THAT SOCRATES "EXPECTS" 97 %. YES VOTE ON APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL OFFICIALS. SOCRATES REPORTEDLY LEANED HARD ON LOCAL OFFICIALS ON THIS ISSUE WHILE AT SAME TIME REASSURING THEM THAT THEY NEED FEAR "NO OUTSIDERS" BEING APPOINTED THEIR AREA. COMELEC OFFICIALSN DLGCD SECY. RONO AND VALENCIA COLUMN HAVE TAKEN SIMILAR LINE.

4. COMELEC NOW ESTIMATING NUMBER OF POSSIBLE REFERENDUM PARTICIPANTS AS OVER 25 MILLION. COMELEC CHAIRMAN STATED VOTER TURNOUT WILL EXCEED 22 MILLION WHO VOTED IN JULY  
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MANILA 02354 241135Z

73. HE ADMITTED POSSIBILITY THAT 3-5 % MIGHT BOYCOTT REFERENDUM. THOSE DOING SO WOULD BE "PROSECUTED ON SELECTIVE BASIS." THERE IS SPECULATION THAT IF TURNOUT EXCEEDS 80 %, GOVERNMENT MAY ONCE AGAIN AMNESTY NON-PARTICIPANTS.

5. COMMENT: WITH PENITENTIAL PROTEST PREDICTABLY SMALL AND CHURCH ESTABLISHMENT PUBLICLY TOEING LINE, MARCOS MAY FEEL LESS CONCERNED AT NATURE OF ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE

FEBRUARY 27. HE IS TAKING NO CHANCES, HOWEVER, AND "ALIENS" WILL BE CONVENIENT SCAPEGOAT IF REFERENDUM RESULTS NOT ALL THAT HE WANTS. STRONG LINE TAKEN BY OFFICIALS ON NEED FOR OVERWHELMING YES VOTE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT QUESTION SUGGESTS MARCOS IS ESPECIALLY CONCERNED ABOUT RESULTS ON THIS QUESTION IN VISAYAS. COURT'S EMPHASIS ON CONSULTATIVE NATURE OF REFERENDUM AND VALENCIA GLOSS THEREON INDICATES PRESIDENT IS DETERMINED TO PROCEED WITH APPOINTMENT OF ALL LOCAL OFFICIALS EVEN SHOULD REFERENDUM REVEAL SIGNIFICANT SENTIMENT FOR THEIR ELECTION. IT ALSO FLATLY CONTRADICTS EARLIER PUBLIC ASSESSMENTS THAT PRESIDENT WOULD BE BOUND BY RESULTS OF VOTE. ELEMENT OF CAUTION INDICATED BY THIS PRONOUNCEMENT SUGGESTIVE OF MARCOS' DESIRE TO PREVENT INIMICAL ASPECTS OF REFERENDUM (SUCH AS NON-PARTICIPATION, NEGATIVE VOTE, ETC.) BEING USED AGAINST HIM DOMESTICALLY OR ABROAD. PARADOXICALLY HIS EFFORTS TO ENSURE THERE NO SURPRISES FEB. 27 REINFORCES WIDELY HELD VIEW REFERENDUM IS A FARCE. THUS, DESPITE ITS EXTREME SENSITIVITY ON THIS POINT, THE HARDER THE GOVERNMENT TRIES TO CREATE AN APPEARANCE OF CONSULTING WITH THE PEOPLE, THE MORE FRAUDULENT THE REFERENDUM APPEARS.

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